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TAGS: PGOV PHUM KDEM VE
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ INCREASING HIS INFLUENCE

Classified By: A/DCM Abelardo A. Arias for Reason 1.5(d)

Summary

¶1. (U) President Hugo Chavez announced his intentions to deepen the "revolution" and disqualified the Coordinadora Democratica as a legitimate political opposition during his 5-hour television show "Alo, Presidente" on August 22. During the program, Chavez also designated Andres Izarra, the Press Secretary at the Venezuelan Embassy in the United States, as the new Minister of Communication and Information, replacing Jesse Chacon, who he named Minister of Interior and Justice. Chavez briefly mentioned the USG, reading a U.S. newspaper editorial and in conjunction with international observers' comments. End Summary.

Strengthening the Revolution

¶2. (U) President Hugo Chavez used his weekly televised "Alo, Presidente" program August 22 to outline his plans for moving forward and deepening the "revolution", which included increasing governance and decreasing corruption. Chavez said he would push for the approval of the "Social Responsibility Law for Radio and Television" that imposes limits on private media and gives the government more control over it. "This should not be seen as a threat, but as a guarantee for more order. This will increase governance," Chavez said. While Chavez asserted that this would help prevent radio and television transmissions used to incite "terrorist or destabilizing" acts, the Venezuelan independent media refers to the proposed legislation as a "gag law."

¶3. (U) Chavez invited public officials to eliminate corruption and do their jobs honestly so as to end all similarities to the "Fourth Republic." He said the National Assembly needed to move forward and appoint the new judges to the Supreme Court, which is currently comprised of 20 judges. Chavez said this would, "take the courts out of corrupt hands." Opposition members, however, say that this will effectively give Chavez control of the court system.

Chavez Disavows the Democratic Coordinator

¶4. (U) Since the Coordinadora Democratica continues to allege fraud in the referendum, despite announcements to the contrary from the Carter Center and Organization of American States (OAS), Chavez said he does not recognize the Coordinadora. Chavez said, "We cannot dialog with those who do not recognize the Constitution, the people." Chavez called for "new leaders" of the opposition to step forward -- governors, mayors or business leaders who are "serious" and recognized the results of a democratic election. Chavez said that despite his win the "rich" should not worry because their rights are guaranteed. "This is a revolution of love, not one filled with hate, nor blood, nor death, nor is it a revolution that ignores the rights of others. What we can is national unity, debate; the transformation of what the word "revolution" means," Chavez said.

Cabinet Reshuffled

¶5. (U) Chavez also designated Andres Izarra, a journalist and the Press Secretary at the Venezuelan Embassy in the United States, as the new Minister of Communication and Information. Izarra will replace Jesse Chacon who Chavez named the new Minister of Interior and Justice. The former Minister of Interior and Justice, Lucas Rincon, was praised by Chavez during his national address, but has not been appointed to a new position by the President.

USG Ignored

16. (U) Chavez briefly mentioned the USG. He read a translation of a "LA Times" editorial which said the USG had supported the coup d'etat in 2002 but was now going to work with Chavez. While talking about receiving recognition from the Carter Center and OAS, Chavez also said, "The Bush government honored their word (recognized the results of the referendum)."

Comment

17. (C) Rincon struck most of the diplomatic corps as a loon. Chacon, a trusted former co-conspirator in the 1992 coup, is more competent, suggesting Chavez wants more from the Interior (police) Ministry. Chavez was clear that he is increasing his hold and influence on Venezuelan institutions.

His vow to deepen the revolution ostensibly focuses on reducing corruption and increasing MVR and GOV honesty (septel). Chavez is also poised to increase government ability to control private radio and television stations should the media bill become law. Chavez' very brief mention of the USG contrasts with his pre-referendum attacks against the U.S.

McFarland

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